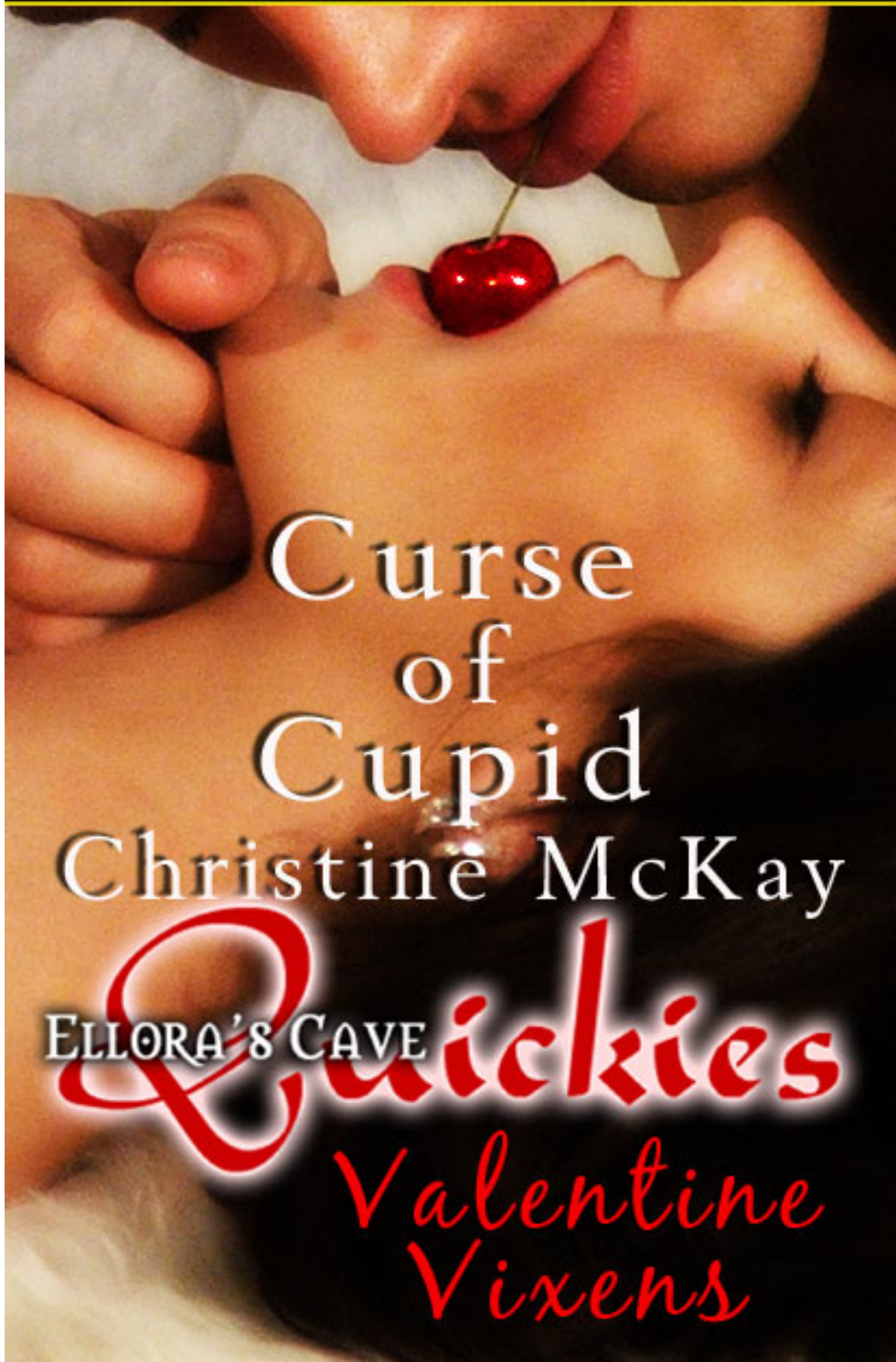


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



Curse
of
Cupid
Christine McKay

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies
*Valentine
Vixens*

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Curse of Cupid

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CURSE OF CUPID

Christine McKay



Dedication

For Keith, my inspiration, my husband and my best friend. What a perfect combo.

Chapter One



Constantine knelt beside the stream. Cupping his hands, he splashed water on his face. The shocking cold sent his breath hissing from his lungs. He wanted to strip and wash. But no amount of scrubbing could cleanse Eros' touch. She was the goddess of love and Constantine, as Cupid, was her slave. He could handle it when Eros chose to have her female form serviced. Last night she had been in a gender-bending mood and no matter what he did, he couldn't please her.

His body ached. Leaning against a tree trunk, he winced. Apparently, she had left some marks as well. He plucked a few loose feathers out of his wings. A light breeze tumbled them along the stream's edge, a sliver of ice amongst the green.

A fat black spider slid down its silken web, dangling in front of his face. The wind made it swing back and forth like a mini-wrecking ball, tossing it higher and higher.

Constantine scurried out of its way on hands and knees. His wings smacked into some low-hanging branches, abruptly halting his escape.

He found himself facing Lachesis. The middle goddess of fate wore her dark chocolate hair in an elegant braid-wrapped bun at the nape of her neck. Her face was lined with fine creases at the edges of her mouth and corners of her eyes. A slight smile played at her lips.

"Con, Con, Con," she tsked. "You never fail to fall for that."

"Have pity. I was mortal once," he complained. He stood, picking twigs out of his hair and wings.

“And still so vain.” The quirk of the lips became a real smile, stripping years off her face. For a goddess who remained in a perpetual state of middle age, she was still a beautiful woman.

He gave her a quick peck on the cheek. “So who do you want to fall in love today?”
“You.”

The smile died on his face. “I hadn’t picked you to be the cruel one of the Fates.”

Lachesis sighed and patted his cheek. “Eros tortures you.”

He glanced away and bent to retrieve his bow. “Yes, well...I am her servant.”

“Slave,” Lachesis corrected.

“Lachesis,” he began, then checked himself. She was of the same species that enslaved him. Arguing with a god would get him nowhere. “I’m told I earned it,” he muttered.

“Nonsense.” She sounded so like his mother that he smiled. Then heartache set in. He should be over her death by now but the hurt never seemed to go completely away.

He sighed. “Seriously, Lachesis.” He tried hard to be polite. “I know Valentine’s Day is coming. And the Fates can’t resist matchmaking.” He held out his hand. “The list, please.”

Lachesis hesitated.

“I’m tired and it’s not fair for you to bear my crankiness,” he said softly. “Please don’t toy with me.”

“I would never do that deliberately.” A scroll popped into Constantine’s open hand. “Did Eros tie you to her bedpost and whip you soundly?” Lachesis asked.

Constantine colored. He was embarrassed to share any details with someone who reminded him so much of his own mother. And there was a chance, however slim, that Eros was listening. He’d left her well sated but the gods had voracious appetites. He unrolled the scroll. “What’s this?”

The writing was written in elaborate calligraphy.

Six times the cock must blow, once as a lady, once as beau.

Once upon the master's head, once below the leather strap.

Once where feet must tread and at last within the trap.

Only then will the bonds be broke and freedom, your right to invoke.

Lachesis watched him closely. "Your chance to be free of Eros."

He simply stared at the paper, unwilling to comprehend what Lachesis said. Then he managed to find his voice. It was cold. "So the gods think I've served my time?" He crumpled the scroll.

"Don't." She touched his hand. "We thought only to offer you hope."

He shook his closed fist at her. "This is hope? After everyone I care about is dead and dust, you dare to offer me this." His voice broke and he closed his eyes. He would not humiliate himself.

"You have less than twenty-four hours, Constantine," Lachesis continued. "Within those hours you must make love to your chosen human six times. A bind will be removed each time you are successful."

He felt the sting of his bindings whenever he tried to oppose Eros. Two on each biceps muscle, one on each wrist. No amount of burning or carving had excised them. He was Eros' creature, always and forever.

"You call this hope?" he whispered hoarsely. One couldn't trust the gods.

Lachesis looked at him with pity. Then her lips twisted in a wry smile. "A god's hope can be cloaked."

"How dare you." He did not raise his voice. His heart, which he thought could not possibly be touched, trembled.

"I dare," Lachesis said simply. Before he could protest, she put both hands flat against his bare chest and shoved.

His blasted wings threw him off balance. He stumbled backward, expecting to strike a tree. But neither tree nor ground stopped his tumble. He simply fell into the darkness.

* * * * *

Rose glanced at her wristwatch. Two-thirty a.m. She had finished checking her patients, updated everyone's charts and was ready to turn everything over to Kym, her replacement who was late. Rose was about to call a standby when Kym floated into the lounge.

"Happy Valentine's Day," Kym crowed.

"You better have a good excuse." Rose handed her log to Kym. Kym simply beamed. "Have you been drinking?"

"Worse." Kym thrust out her hand. "Tony proposed."

Rose stared at the diamond ring and felt the jealousy monster stab her in the heart. "Oh, wow."

Kym was too wound up to notice the less than enthusiastic response. "And I want you to be my maid of honor."

The knife twisted in her heart. Rose could barely catch her breath. "I don't know what to say." She gave Kym a hug. "Congrats. Tony is lucky to have such a wonderful woman." She pulled back, gripping Kym's shoulders. "We were supposed to become spinsters together."

Kym hugged her again. "I know. I know. I can't wait to show everyone." And she practically skipped out of the room.

Rose was happy for her. Just not at this particular moment. And that made her feel guilty. Thank God her shift was over and she could go home and wallow in her own self-pity.

Rose climbed into her car, turned on her headlights and started for home. The radio was still playing preprogrammed tunes and she turned up the dial. They helped drown out the silence...and the loneliness.

Most of the time she didn't mind being single. But at times there was this ache that nothing could fill up, not even Mr. Blue, her favorite dildo. Sometimes she wished she could crawl into the arms of a gorgeously handsome man who doted on her. Could one blame a girl for wanting a good clean bedroom romp every now and then? *Sheesh*. She couldn't even remember the last time she had quality sex. How pathetic. A familiar song came on the radio. She turned up the music even more and began to sing.

The crunch of flesh and bone striking steel and plastic echoed a second later.

Screaming, Rose jammed on the brakes.

The wheels squealed and the car came to a lurching stop. There was another dull thud. In the drunken beams of her headlights, a fluff of white feathers fluttered down from the darkness.

Rose sat completely still for a second, listening to her heart bang against her breastbone. Her hands clutched the steering wheel in a white-knuckled death grip. More feathers rained down. Oh for chrissake, she must have hit the neighbor's geese. *Calm down*. Part of her wondered just how much damage a goose could do to a car. The other part wondered why the frickin' geese were wandering on the road at three in the morning.

She stepped out of the car. She had to know if what she hit was dead or injured. The car lights illuminated the scene well enough. And then her mind went into shock.

She must have hit her head. People didn't just fall from the sky. And they certainly as hell didn't have six-foot wings attached to them. Then the no-nonsense nurse in her took over. The angel man lay crumpled in front of her car, one wing draped over part of her crunched hood, the other curled under his body. There was blood coming from his side.

She backed away, retrieved a first-aid kit from the trunk of the car and returned to his side. Her mind was analyzing the extent of his injuries before she'd even donned gloves. His breathing was slow and even. She laid two fingers against his throat. His pulse was steady too. Her eyes roved over his bare chest. Muscles popped and rippled like a bodice-ripping cover of a romance novel. She licked her lips.

Focus now, she told herself sternly. This man, creature, whatever he was, was bleeding all over the asphalt. She needed to staunch the blood. *Admire the view later*.

There were two wooden shafts sticking out of a seeping hole in his side. She gently probed the gash. His eyelids fluttered and he groaned. She bet he had a handsome face when it wasn't contorted in pain. Her fingers searched deeper. The wooden shafts were tipped with metal. She skirted their edges, lightly tracing their size and shape. The shafts would have to come out before she could plug the hole. Gritting her teeth, she grasped one shaft, eyed its position and angle, and pulled.

The man's body lurched up, back arching. And she had a front row seat for the muscle dance. His wings fluttered and she raised an arm to keep from getting pelted. "Sorry, pal," she muttered. Then she steeled herself and gripped the second shaft. It came out easier than the first. She folded a bandage against his wound and pressed. *Now what?* Call the police and explain that she'd hit some half man, half bird on her way home? They'd think she was drunk.

Maybe she was.

She kept one hand at his side, pressure firm. With her other hand, she carefully traced the graceful arch of wing bent beneath his body. It certainly looked real. She leaned forward and felt along his back. The wing attached to his back. Not with straps, but with flesh, muscle and tendon.

His eyes popped open, six inches from her face. She yipped and sat back. They were deep midnight blue, filled with intelligence. A mop of blond hair partially draped over his face. He shook it back, wincing.

"Where am I? Who are you?" he asked.

"I was about to ask you the same thing, only my twenty questions start with what are you?"

"I hurt," he said simply. His voice was deep and rich, a perfect sexy match to his features.

"No shit. I hit you with my car."

He smiled a bit lopsided. "Now why would you do that?" Shifting, he groaned. The wing bent over her car's hood and fender folded, tucking tighter to his body. She was mesmerized by its motion.

"So you can control them?"

He held his hand up and waggled his fingers at her. "Like my hand." He propped himself up on his elbows and grimaced.

"You're bleeding," she said. "I pulled those out of you." She pointed at the two bloody shafts.

"Bastard son of bloody Zeus," he cursed. "That wily bitch..."

"Excuse me?"

"Sorry." He glanced at her, his voice suddenly gone cold. "You need to leave. Now."

"You're hurt," she protested.

"I heal fast." He reached for the bandage. Their fingertips brushed and she felt a tingle.

His hand closed over hers, lacing their fingers. Then he abruptly pulled them free. "Damn it, it's already working."

"What's working?"

"Look, I don't mean to be rude, but you're caught up in the gods' crossfire. It'd be best if you left now. I can't guarantee what I'll be like in a few minutes." He brushed her hand from the bandage, pressing it against his side himself.

"Fine." She rocked back on her heels and stood. "You just lay there in the road and bleed while I drive away." She paused and glanced at her car. "Who's going to pay for this damage?"

"You hit me, lady."

"Rose. My name is Rose Sheridan."

"You got to be kidding. Rose? How perfect," he muttered.

"Excuse me?"

He glared at her, his blue eyes bright with rage. "Happy fucking Valentine's Day, Rose. You just hit Cupid with your car and stuck me with my own arrows."

* * * * *

Rose's pert little mouth formed a perfect O. "Cupid? As in the fat little cherub with wings?" She nudged the bloody arrow shafts with her foot. "These are arrows? Who the hell are you?"

"That's a quite a mouth on you."

"Speak for yourself." She pulled off her bloody gloves and tossed them on the ground beside the arrows. "Great," she muttered to herself, examining her hands. She headed to the backside of her car, then returned with a bottle. Kneeling in front of the headlights, she poured alcohol over her index finger, dabbed it dry and covered it with a bandage. She gave him a dark stare. "You don't have AIDS?"

"What?"

"AIDS? Hepatitis?" she repeated, her voice calm. When he continued to stare, she said, "I cut myself rooting around in your wound. Do you have something communicable?"

"Um, no." Her sandy brown hair was pulled back in a loose ponytail. Wispy tendrils of hair floated around her face. Her face was round, with a cute button of a nose and a bow-shaped mouth. Backlit by the headlights, she looked like an angel. He

shook his head. That was his own potion talking, coursing through his veins right now. And if she cut herself on one of his arrows, she was infected as well.

“What do you see when you look at me?” he asked.

“A foul-mouthed, ungrateful man who happens to have wings.”

Well, the good news was the potion wasn't rushing through her system just yet. The bad news was that not only was he smitten but he was also hurt. He offered her a winsome smile and held out a hand. “Can you help me to my feet?”

She hesitated, then offered him her hand. He gripped her wrist, pulling himself to his feet. She was stronger than she looked. His thumb absently stroked her wrist. Her pulse fluttered beneath the touch then she dropped his hand as if he were poison. Turning, she headed for her car. He wasn't expecting that kind of reaction. It intrigued him.

He followed her.

“I have pepper spray in my purse,” she said casually. She opened the driver's side door, putting it between them.

“Do I look like I want to hurt you?”

She met his stare. Her eyes were hazel, edged with green flecks. His stomach flip-flopped and the lust kicked in. *Just the potion*, he reminded himself. *Down, boy*. His penis stood at full salute, wedged uncomfortably in his pants.

Her gaze flicked to his pants and back to his face. He couldn't quite read the emotions that skittered through her eyes. She pressed her lips tight. “I am going to see if my car starts. If it does, I'm driving home, opening up a nice bottle of wine and drinking until I forget you.”

His free hand caught the car door. “Wait.”

She paused.

“I need a ride.”

She eyed him uneasily. "I don't trust you and I have no idea what in God's name you are. Plus you're doing something to my head, and I don't like it."

"I told you, I'm Cupid and we were both stuck with my arrows."

"Yeah, right. And I'm Joan of Arc."

"She was burned at the stake," Con reminded her.

She rolled her eyes.

He reached out and stroked her cheek. Her breath caught in her throat. "If I'm not Cupid, how do you explain this?" His fingers trailed down her neck, toying with the flesh peeking out of the edge of her collar. Lust flared in her eyes.

"Lack of sleep." She sounded a bit uncertain.

"Bullshit." He leaned around the door. She pressed herself tight against the car's frame. "Just stealing a kiss," he whispered.

Her "no" was breathed into his mouth. She was kindling to his fiery need. Her lips were as soft as they looked, but she did not wait for his lead. Her hands fisted in his hair, guiding his head. Her tongue brushed against his lips, demanding entrance. When her tongue darted into his mouth, he let the potion overwhelm reason and restraint.

His arm snaked around her waist, pulling her close. He could feel her nipples thrusting through the fabric of her thin coat. He pressed his lips to her neck, flicking his tongue across her fluttering pulse. She whimpered low in her throat. He slipped the ponytail clasp from her hair. Her hair spilled loose, tumbling to her shoulders. He wondered what it would feel like to have her hair brushing his chest while she pumped out a rhythm on top him.

Her hands stroked his bare chest, as if they shared one mind, fingertips tracing a path from his nipples to his waist. He dropped his bandage and seized her face in both hands. She gripped one of his biceps and with a soft moan, slid a single finger into the waistband of his pants.

He froze.

Her eyes were wide and wild, dark with wicked thoughts. She ran her finger around the edge of his waistband, back and forth. Her finger left a searing track. She tugged on the button of his pants, the tip of her tongue cradled between parted lips. He needed to bury his head in the valley of her breasts, to taste her sweet nectar, to drive reason and sanity from her mind. His skin burned for hers.

He dropped his hands from her face, fumbling with the unfamiliar clasps on her coat.

The dark sexiness retreated from her gaze. She pulled away. "No. I can't. What are we doing?"

"Do you have a lover?" he asked, his voice rough. He couldn't help himself, couldn't control his need. She was very likely going to lose any remaining inhibitions in a few short minutes. And then gods help them both.

"I... No."

The only way he knew how to quench the flame was to let it burn out. He wanted her beneath him, whimpering his name. He wanted to see her straddling him, those teasing curves of her breasts bared to him. His shaft ached for her strong fingers.

"One night," he pleaded.

She looked bemused. "It's almost daylight. I need to sleep."

"Tell me you don't feel it too." He kept his voice pitched low, husky and seductive. The way she looked at him made him want to explode. "Take me home," he whispered. Another minute and she would be his.

"I—"

"No," he interrupted, laying a finger on her lips. "No thinking. No regrets. Just pure carnal sex. Two adults, indulging their passion. Okay?" He kept his finger on her lips until she slowly nodded her head. "Good girl." He kissed her forehead and tried not to think of all the other bits and pieces of her he wanted to ravage with his lips.

She waited until he was in the car before she said, "Don't bleed on my car seat."

He sighed to himself and silently cursed the Fates.

Chapter Two



Rose's car died in the driveway. If her mind hadn't already been besieged by the thought of the sexy man with wings in her passenger seat, she might have been concerned. As it was, reality had taken a backseat right around three a.m. It was Valentine's Day. She was parked in her driveway with Cupid. And sans wings, he could have walked off a Mr. Fitness America poster.

What more could she possibly want?

He was watching her with a half smile on his face. His hair curled into his eyes. He swept it back with one hand.

Her heart skipped a beat. "How's your wound doing?"

He pulled the bandage off and glanced down. "Almost healed." The flesh was shiny pink and puckered.

She touched it with her fingertips. "Remarkable." A little thrill went through her. Her fingers itched to trace those six-pack abs a handbreadth away.

"It's the potion," he said, apologetic.

Her fingers curled, nails pressed tight to her palms, while her mind screamed in protest, *Touch him!* "Do you have a name? A real name?"

He seemed surprised that she should care. "Constantine."

"Constantine, would you like to come in for a cup of coffee?" It was a blatant out-and-out lie.

His lips curved. She felt her insides turn to mush. She'd never had this kind of reaction to a man before. She wanted to kiss those lips until they were swollen and leave a trail of love bites in her wake.

“I would love a cup of coffee,” he replied, charmingly polite. His blue eyes twinkled like a star-studded evening sky.

She answered his smile with one of her own and led him to her house. Constantine pounced on her as soon as the door opened. Her purse and keys hit the floor with a *thunk*. He kicked the door shut with his foot. His arms wrapped around her and lifted her to his height. She kissed him first, a tangle of tongues, and gentle nips, while the blood roared in her ears. Her hands slid up his arms, caressing his flexing biceps, until they reached his face and fisted in his hair. His wings cupped both their bodies, cocooning them in a soft cushion of feathers.

He buried his head against her throat, licking until she moaned. She pressed herself tight against him. His fingers fumbled with the buttons on her blouse. “It’s been a long time,” he explained.

She silenced his apology with a fingertip laid against his lips. Pulling away from him, she slowly undid the buttons, until just her bra was exposed. She wished that she had worn something sexy beneath her plain-Jane white blouse.

He eyed the silky white cotton, then glanced at her face. There was nothing but lust in his gaze. Not disappointment. She relaxed.

It wasn’t as if she were a virgin, but this...this man, god, whatever he was, standing before her was the most exquisite creature who’d ever expressed interest in her. And she wanted to do all sorts of things to him, starting with exploring his muscle-ripped body with her tongue.

“Constantine,” she breathed. “You’re gorgeous.” She saw something flick through his eyes, almost like pain, but it was gone too quickly.

Then his hands were on her breasts, kneading them through the silky fabric. He played with her nipples until they formed snow-capped peaks. He kissed a path between her breasts, fingers working with the rest of the buttons. She was a bit self-conscious of her stomach. After all, she wasn’t twenty-one anymore. But he made no

mention of it, only continued kissing his way to her waist. On his knees, he looked up at her through a mop of curly blond hair.

She touched his cheek and he took her hand, kissing her palm. For some reason, that one gentle gesture sent her heart trembling toward the trouble zone. She deliberately ignored the warning. Today, this moment, was hers, even if she was only hallucinating it all.

“Bedroom?” he asked as he undid the button on her jeans.

She pointed down the hallway. “Second door on the left.”

He picked her up and draped her over his shoulder. She squealed and then dissolved into giggles. “I can walk.”

Constantine patted her bottom. “Don’t worry. I’m enjoying the view.”

“Mmm, me too.” His broad shoulders sloped to a sweet globe of an ass framed by his wings, Eden’s forbidden fruit. She traced where his wings met his body in a great conglomeration of muscle and tendon, marveling at the seemingly simple architecture of it all. He shivered.

“Ticklish?” she teased.

“I hadn’t thought so.”

She ran her fingers lightly over the spot again. “How could you not know?” He shivered again then abruptly tossed her on the bed. She gasped.

Then his mood changed. He imprisoned her body with a cage of steely arms and wings. His legs pressed hers to the mattress. His hands gripped her wrists, pinning her down, his wings draped on either side of the double bed.

She searched his face. “Why are you here?”

He shook his head, then kissed her forehead. “Later. I promise.” His voice was hoarse, eyes dark with the same passion that rode her. His slight movement brought something else to her attention. Somewhere during the five strides to her bedroom, he’d lost his pants. His thick penis pressed against the smooth fabric of her panties.

He must have seen the confusion on her face. "Magic," he breathed, then ruined the whole effect by wiggling his eyebrows. "Let's be rid of those." He rested his weight on one elbow and snapped his fingers with his free hand. Her jeans and panties simply disappeared.

He tapped her labia lips with his shaft.

"Not so quick." She shimmied down until she and his penis were eye to eye. He was both thick and long. It sent a stab of fear and excitement coursing through her. She felt herself clench and dribble moisture down her thigh. Wrapping both hands around him, she sucked on his head, gently twirling her tongue around its ridges. He moaned. Her insides clenched again.

She glanced up through her lashes. His head was thrown back, arms, chest, and abs tensed. She continued to lick and suck, adding her hands to the motion of her tongue.

"Rose," he groaned. "Oh by the gods, Rose, what are you doing?"

She redoubled her efforts.

"Rose." He captured her wrists with his fingers. "Have pity. I haven't had sex with a mortal in centuries."

"Oh lord, so you're basically a virgin."

"Sex with a mortal," he clarified. He drew her tenderly upward and laid a kiss in the hollow of her throat.

His head dropped and he nuzzled between her breasts. Her breath caught in her throat. He licked a long line around her body, following the edge of her bra from one side to the other and back. Then the fabric vanished as well. She never heard him snap his fingers.

He latched onto her breast, sucking hard until she felt the tug deep inside her. With her nipple trapped between his teeth, he pulled back, stretching the breast until she arched her back and moaned. His deep midnight eyes watched her, even as he licked the tender skin beneath her creamy swells.

“Rose, look at me.” And he plunged two fingers into her. She arched up, whimpering. He moved them in and out, his thumb lightly rubbing her clit. His other hand supported her neck, drawing her head to his chest. He smelled feral, a primal scent that raised the light hairs on her arms, the scent of a hunter, and she, his prey.

His fingers curled, tickling her G-spot. She gasped as the intensity of the movement struck her. His wings folded around her as he held her, cocooning her from the outside world. The scent of him was all she smelled. The beat of his heart was all she heard. And the smooth flow of muscle and tendon was all she saw.

She came swift and fierce, her body bucking. His fingers seemed to fuse to her, her body unwilling to free him. A third finger joined its companions in her wet, slick well. She wriggled against them, welcoming the invasion. Constantine murmured to her in another language, a rhythmic chant that flowed in unison with his deep curved strokes. His breath brushed her cheek. She came a second time before her body even stopped trembling from the first.

That was impossible. It had to be magic.

“Look at me,” he pleaded, a desperate tone in his voice.

She opened her eyes and he plunged his shaft into her. His body was silhouetted by fire, the sunrise edging him like an eclipse. He stretched her, rubbing her in places she didn’t think possible. Her body seemed to be one giant nerve, all touch, sound deprived by the blood rushing through her ears. The build-up within her was like the coming of a lightning strike. Her nipples stood at attention, every muscle rigid. He grasped a nipple between his teeth, nipped it, then sucked away the swift pain. When the orgasm finally struck, her breath caught in her throat, her body went rigid and she thought she died. He pumped into her at the same time, crying out, a sound mixed with pain and pleasure. His wings spread. Each individual feather vibrated, as if quivering in an unseen wind.

Then he collapsed on top of her, wings draping them like an impromptu bedspread. Their joined skin was hot and slick with sweat. His pulse beat quick and erratic. Hers

felt none too steady either. The dark passion pulsing through her veins stirred. *Again*, it whispered. *Not yet*, she pleaded.

A stray feather tickled her cheek. She blew it away. "I didn't kill you, did I?" Her voice was thick with sex.

She felt the laughter burbling up in him. His arms wrapped around her and he pulled them both to their sides. He nuzzled her neck. "Thank you."

She turned in his arms. "You're thanking me?" she said, incredulous. "Me?"

His smile turned shy.

"I could die right now and be completely okay with it."

The smile slid from his face. "Don't say that." He looked worried.

"Hey now." She cupped his cheek. "I was kidding."

"Sweeting, there are forces at work that would probably be only too happy to see you dead."

The euphoric magic carpet ride screeched to a halt. "Go ahead. Tell me." She knew there had to be a catch.

He hesitated, playing with loose strands of her hair. "Eros is my mistress. She's a god and I am her slave." He met her sympathetic gaze. "The Fates, apparently, have taken pity on me. I have been given a twenty-four-hour reprieve and a chance at freedom."

She propped herself up on her elbow. "And you're lying here, wasting it with me?" She glanced at the clock on her nightstand. "It's seven a.m. already."

Constantine pushed her back down, then planted a kiss on her nose. "You're part of my redemption."

She stared at him. She wasn't some tough gun-toting, magic-wielding woman. How did he expect her to go against a god's will? Assuming she continued to believe him. The wings, though, were a great faith-inspiring prop.

"And the arrow I was stuck with? This will make me want to help you?"

He glanced away. "That was not my doing."

"I generally don't take men I've just met home to my bed."

"I'm sorry. There's no antidote."

She sighed. "Don't take it personally. I don't like the thought of being manipulated. Go ahead, you were going to tell me about your curse."

He still did not meet her gaze. "I was an asshole." When she made a noise to protest, he shushed her. "I was. I got by on my looks and I took no care with the hearts placed in my hands. One of the ladies whose heart I broke happened to have a god as a father. He wasn't pleased. And he gave me to Eros as punishment."

"Your mistress."

"Yes. Mistress. Master. She or he takes many forms." He sighed, then appeared to make a decision. "I serve all of Eros' needs. She is the goddess of love. She needs sex like we need air to breathe."

"Eww."

"Exactly."

She had an unsettling thought. "Umm, Eros doesn't have any communicable diseases, does she?"

That brought a grin to his face, but not to his eyes. "No, gods are exempt from your human illnesses."

She released a pent-up breath she wasn't aware she was holding. Being a nurse made her just a bit paranoid about disease.

"It was not my choice to drag you into the affairs of the immortals. Lachesis had other ideas. One of the Fates," he added. "You can walk away." He touched her cheek and his smile was sad. "I don't want to see you hurt."

Her heart made the decision before her mind could reason with it. "Try me. I can't say no until I understand what you're up against."

“Lachesis gave me a riddle. We’ve already broken one of my bindings without even trying.” He rolled to his back and freed his left arm, comparing it to his right. An intricate green, gold and blue tattoo filled with swirls and knots circled one wrist. The other was bare. Two more tattooed bracelets ringed each of his biceps. “See, Eros’ mark is gone.” He held out his bare wrist, rubbing it with his other hand as if he were still astonished.

“The riddle involves sex?” She was secretly thrilled. One didn’t need guns or magic to have sex.

“Six times the cock must blow, once as a lady, once as a beau. Once upon the master’s head, once below the leather strap. Once where feet must tread and at last within the trap.”

Rose inwardly cringed. “The Fates aren’t Shakespeare, are they? I hope you have some insight.”

“I think I do,” he murmured. “But the real question is are you willing to indulge me?”

“To have more sex with you? Oh yeah.”

He tapped the tip of her nose with his forefinger. “You may need to stretch your boundaries.”

She reached for one of his wings and ran her fingers through the feathers. “Worse than this?”

He chuckled. “They’re just the icing, sweeting.”

“Try me.”

“How do you feel about anal sex?”

“What? You can’t be serious.” A dark anticipation rolled through her even as she spoke.

“Me. Not you.”

“Once as a lady. Once as a beau.” It was clever, really. She gnawed at her lip. She’d always read erotic novels and wished she were as adventurous as the heroines. Here was her chance.

“We could still have nice vanilla sex until Eros comes to fetch me. I could easily spend a day worshipping your curves.”

Rose was silent.

“I wouldn’t think any less of you.”

She reached for his hand. He paused, then threaded his fingers through hers. “You wouldn’t, by chance, have a strap-on penis?”

“A dildo?” Tracing a winding path around his abs with a finger, she paused and gave him a sidelong glance. “Maybe.”

“Then I needlessly worried about corrupting you. I apologize.”

“I look that innocent?”

“You do.” He said it with a straight face, eyes full of sincerity.

She didn’t know if she could trust him.

“How about I take a shower while you get ready to surprise me?”

It’d give her enough time to open a bottle of wine and boost her courage. “Time’s a-wasting.”

He rolled off the bed in one fluid moment. She watched him walk away. Now that was a man. His legs were sculpted, a slick curve of calf sloping to hamstring and tucking up to support round firm buttocks. The tips of his wings brushed the ground and they were just as erotic as his ass. The smooth arc of their span accented his broad shoulders, everything softened by the downy feathers. And he was hers, all hers, for another sixteen hours.

* * * * *

When he returned from the shower, a towel wrapped around his waist, she was ready for him. At least as ready as one could be for a supernatural creature. She wore a burgundy silk negligee that dipped dangerously low, revealing the curve of her breasts. They were kept in check by the snug high waistline. The skirt, if one could call it that, flared away in six overlapping sheer Vs of fabric that swirled around her legs as she walked.

She wore the strap-on underneath and that made her smile. She'd bought it on a whim and a dare, a bit drunk at the time and trying to shock her friends. After a particularly rough day at work, she often poured herself a glass of wine and slipped into it. It made her feel powerful and sexy.

Of course, when she saw Constantine in nothing more than a towel and her towel to boot, she wanted to throw herself at him, dildo be damned. His blond hair was tinted bronze by the moisture and the curls at his crown were sexily unkempt. With sheer stubbornness alone, she kept up the charade, leaning casually in the doorway of her bedroom.

He folded his arms across his chest and raised an eyebrow. "You've done this before, madam?"

Her lips curved. "Perhaps." Thank God for the doorframe. Her knees were weak.

"I think you're bluffing."

"I think you're scared," she taunted. Crossing her legs, she felt her dildo between her thighs, hard and waiting.

He scooped her up in his arms and carried her the rest of the way into the bedroom.

"You're ruining the effect." But her arms slipped around his neck and she laid her head against his chest. She was pleased to hear his heart match her pulse's erratic pace.

He paused beside the bed. She had drawn the blinds then scavenged and lit every candle she owned. They balanced precariously on her window ledge, decorated her nightstand and dresser and lined the hastily emptied bookshelves in the far corners. Their combined scent was heady, a bit exotic and unexpectedly arousing.

He stood spellbound. "For me?" he whispered.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

He set her down carefully beside the bed. "Rose..." He looked around. She saw his eyes gleam and he blinked. "Rose," he said again and his voice was hoarse. "No one's cared for me this much in a long time."

She was touched. "They're just candles."

"They're your magic," he murmured.

Her hand curled around his unbound wrist, the wrist she'd freed for him. She crawled onto the freshly made bed, pulling him after her. He sprawled on her bed, head propped up on an elbow, one leg flat, the other bent. She saw his inquisitive cock peek out from between the folds of the towel.

"You're a wicked man."

He grinned. "Why?" His penis bounced up and down, nodding its head at her.

She laughed. "I have one of my own, thank you, so no need for yours." She gripped her dildo and revealed it, the wisps of her skirt parting like stage curtains. But she only had eyes for the glistening tip of his shaft.

Constantine paled. "What in Medusa's beard is that?"

"Mr. Blue," she said proudly. She slapped the twelve-inch dildo against her thigh, trying hard not to smirk.

"Tell me that has been in your sassy little sheath."

"You fit, didn't you?"

"Blessed Goddess, Rose," he choked.

"So roll over and take your medicine like a good boy." She sounded braver than she felt.

His eyes sparked with a mischievousness she knew she was going to regret. Pulling off the towel, he obediently rolled over.

Dear Lord, the sight of his ass made her break into a light sweat. She kissed the round swell of each cheek. Her mouth went dry and her courage fled.

“A little lubrication would be very much appreciated,” he prompted.

She retrieved the lube from her nightstand. Parting his cheeks with one hand, she spread a generous dollop of gel in his valley. Setting aside the lube, she grasped Mr. Blue in her hand and lightly thumped him on the buttocks. “Ready?”

“Just about.” He freed a hand and snapped his fingers. Mr. Blue visibly shrunk in size and diameter, his ridged little head barely poking above her closed fist.

“That’s not fair,” she protested.

“When you’re done emasculating me, I promise to return him to his proper grandeur.”

She wondered what Eros had done to him and if Constantine had any say in it. Leaning over him, she pressed her breasts to his back. “Nothing anyone has done or will do will ever make you any less masculine,” she whispered into his ear.

She trailed kisses down his spine, skimming his skin with the silky fabric of her negligee. “I promise I’ll make you plead,” she purred.

“I’d prefer if you were the one doing the beseeching,” he muttered.

Inspiration struck. “Wait here.” She rose, Mr. Blue bobbing as she walked. She closed the bedroom door.

“Modest all of a sudden?”

She snickered. “Mirror.” And pointed to the full-length mirror mounted on the back of the door.

His eyes darkened. Without a word, he stood and fetched a chair, positioning it in front of the mirror. Dropping to his knees, he folded his arms across the chair seat and waited. With his wings spread around him, he looked like an angel at prayer. No angel she had ever read about had willingly taken it in the ass.

She eased Mr. Blue into his tight crevice, her shaved pussy rubbing against the smooth curve of his buttocks. Mr. Blue seemed to have shrunk even more. Leaning over him, she whispered, "Are you watching me?"

His head turned and she met his gaze in the mirror. They looked like wraiths, eyes dark, his skin tanned a bit more than her own pale flesh. In the candlelight, her negligee and her painted lips were the only splash of color. Her own lust, apprehension, and excitement reflected back at her.

She wrapped an arm around the flat expanse of his abdomen. His wings tickled her breasts, the fine down taunting her nipples through the fabric of her negligee. Pressing a finger to her nub, she massaged it. Her nerves felt as if they were being stroked by silk. Constantine groaned. A glistening bead of moisture formed on the tip of his erect penis.

"Feel me?" she whispered. She felt powerful, in control of both their appetites. She watched her dildo dip inside him, in and out. Her finger matched the rhythm of her own thrusts. Her hips ground Mr. Blue into him.

Her hand dropped to his penis, her finger capturing the drop of moisture on the head of his shaft. She watched him in the mirror as she brought it to her lips. His eyes went black. He bucked against her, grinding himself into her. Her hand closed around his straining penis and she set a rhythm of her own.

Constantine groaned, eyes rolling back. It sent heat rolling through her. She controlled him, held him in check. It was she who could release him when and if she willed it. Her will. Not his. The heat spilled from her hips and rippled down her thighs. Her insides clenched, cursing at the emptiness of her vagina. His feathers stroked along her arms and the sides of her breasts, leaving her breathless. Her moans mingled with his. He whispered something that sounded like a prayer. She was abruptly naked. His hips increased their pace. They were one slick body, melded together at the waist. She couldn't have stopped if she wanted to.

He exploded in her hands.

The chair tipped over. Constantine rolled and pulled her on top of him. His fingers closed around a slick Mr. Blue and jerked it free of its harness.

“What are you doing?”

He flipped Mr. Blue in his hand. The other hand closed into a fist, turned it palm up, and opened. Like a magician revealing a coin, a foil-wrapped condom appeared on his palm. He unwrapped the condom, swathing Mr. Blue in lambskin. Then he sunk it into her vagina. Mr. Blue grew inside her, as thick and as long as it had been before Constantine worked his magic. It filled her up, stretching her lips over its wide blue expanse. He worked it in and out of her in languid strokes. Her hips matched his rhythm.

The storm built inside her, a slow-growing maelstrom of unsated pussy, strung-tight muscles and ragged nerves. Constantine reached back and plucked a feather from his wings. He ran the feather across her breasts, circling her areolas until her nipples stood at attention. Every part of her screamed for release.

The feather dropped to her throbbing clit. His touch was light, but it felt as if he dragged heavy velvet across her nub. She whimpered. He twisted Mr. Blue as he entered her, twirling him, filling every crevice inside her.

And then everything imploded. Stars literally burst across her vision. Sound ceased. She felt her muscles turn from liquid to steel and back to liquid again. Her eyes went wide and blind, the room a hazy glow of flickering starlight. She collapsed to his chest, spent.

A while later she stirred. “Constantine,” she murmured. She was floating rather dreamily above herself, muscle and nerve but a memory.

“Shush now, my heart,” he breathed in her ear. His fingers stroked the tender skin beneath her breasts, but there was no urgency to his movements. He pulled the blankets around them, tucking them in.

Her eyelids were impossibly heavy. She closed her eyes and slept.

* * * * *

She woke with a start, bolting upright. She'd had the best dream of her life and then she'd let it slip away. There'd been an angel. She rubbed her forehead. Not an angel, Cupid. She'd hit Cupid with her car.

"If you're getting up to fetch a cup of coffee, I'd love to have one as well," a sleepy masculine voice said behind her.

She yanked the sheet to her chest and turned. Constantine smiled at her. "Good morning."

It wasn't a dream. It was real and he was here. He was real. She reached out and stroked one of his wings. The feather shafts tickled her palm.

"I'm crazy," she muttered.

"No, just sleep-deprived and well fucked." He patted a spot beside him. "Not a bad combination, I might add."

It took a few moments for her brain to kick in but her body had no time adjusting. Her nipples poked through the fabric of the sheet and she felt herself go damp. He smiled lazily, his eyes half-opened. "I could wake up to you every morning and not grow bored." His smile faded.

She dropped the sheet and grabbed his wrists. They were both bare. She rubbed his skin where the tattoo had been. *Impossible*. Her hands went to his biceps where the two elaborate tattoos decorated each one.

"You let me sleep," she accused. "How could you let me sleep when you have so little time?"

"You are beautiful to watch while you sleep," he said softly, a bit of wistfulness in his tone. He twisted his hands out of her grip to cup her face.

"We have so little time."

"If I go back to Eros tonight, I will have you to dream about. I am content."

"No!" She was shocked by the strength of her protest.

His smile widened. "If I could paint a portrait of passion, it'd be you at this very moment. All wild-eyed, hair in disarray, color high on your cheeks." He touched his finger to her lips, then let it slide down her chin and along her neck. "Lips swollen and skin marked by her lover."

"I'm not willing to lose you to some grudge-bearing god. What next?"

"We eat. Have a cup of coffee. I like mine with sugar and cream. You?"

"Black and stop changing the subject."

He sighed.

"Once upon the master's head," she said out loud, repeating the riddle. "Eros' head?"

"Not my master's head, but the master." He stretched and his wings fluttered around him. Her eyes focused on the rippled dance of his abdomen muscles.

"Master of what?" She sat up and slipped into the bathrobe draped at the foot of her bed. He obviously wasn't in any hurry. And he did have a point. She was hungry. They'd need to eat if they wanted to keep up this frenzied pace.

"Of sex I'm assuming. That'd be Vatsyayana Mallanaga."

"Bless you."

"Very funny. The author of the *Kama Sutra*." Constantine stood, completely naked, and padded across the room. "You do have cream in your refrigerator? Real cream?"

She followed him out. "Just because I'm not model-thin doesn't mean I keep lard and sugary crap in my fridge."

He glanced over his shoulder. "I'm looking for cream. And why are women so concerned about their weight when it's their sexual self-awareness men are drawn to, not size?" He sounded a bit irritated.

She didn't want to argue the point. "I only have powdered cream."

He sighed the sigh of a martyred man. "One day on Earth and all I get is a dried crusty imposter."

“Do your magic and ta-da, make cream. Or better yet, snap up some mocha latte from the gas station.”

He looked at her like she had finally gone mad. “It’s easy to make things disappear.” He waved his hand. “Have you seen me conjure anything out of thin air?”

Her lips quirked. “The condom.”

“I stole it from your nightstand drawer and tucked it in my feathers.”

Her eyes narrowed.

“Just in case. You were so worried about disease. I thought you might be concerned about mixing fluids as well. I wanted nothing to dampen your enthusiasm.”

She was both impressed and grossed out at the same time. Had she retained any sense, she would have thought of it herself.

So much for fantasizing about conjuring up soup and salad from the deli back in town. She fixed them grilled ham and cheese sandwiches instead.

“Not to be a chronic clock watcher, but how do you propose getting us to India in less than twelve hours?”

He stood, brushing crumbs off his fingers, then wrapped one arm around her waist, nestling her back against his chest. His wings cupped her body protectively. He held his hand out in front of her. “I just have to snap my fingers.”

She seized his hand. “Not so fast.” Just like that? Just like that and they could be across the world. Well, she wasn’t going to go anywhere in a bathrobe. “I don’t have a passport.”

“I’ve forgotten how you mortals worry about your rules and pieces of paper. We’re going to the Thousand Pillar Temple, not through customs.”

“At least let me get dressed.” And grab a camera. She might never have this chance again. “What’s the weather like there?”

He laughed, delighted. "I'd never grow tired of you, Rose. We have a few minutes to spare. Fetch what you think you'll need." He crossed his arms and leaned in the kitchen doorway, amusement dancing on his face.

"And what about yourself?" she asked. "Do you intend to go nude?"

"It'd save time," he pointed out.

She giggled. That it would. She tried to picture him getting through the airport wearing nothing but his wings. And couldn't. She couldn't picture him in her world at all. A niggling part of her mind whispered, "*What happens when he has to leave?*" She didn't want to think about it. She wouldn't.

Another snap of his fingers had him dressed in the pair of soft khaki pants she had met him in. He took her hand and drew her to him. "Shall we?"

She blinked and they were standing under the shade of a giant intricate stone structure. The column soared above their heads, a fat block of stone with a geometrically carved center, topped by another block of stone. Two stone beams spanned from the center of the pillar, to touch another set of stone pillars, and yet another. It looked like a giant's toy erector set. Beyond the stones lay a sun-drenched garden.

Rose could only stare. Unmoved by the aura of reverence emanating from the stones themselves, Constantine strode toward another part of the structure. She hurried after him.

"How do you know this Kama Sutra guy is here?" she asked.

"I buried him myself." He paused at the corner of the temple, where the overhead stone beams met in a point. "Eros wanted him. But the gods said no. So she had one of his mistresses poison him. Then she tried to resurrect him." His gaze was distant. "What was left of him was a mess." He shook his head, as if trying to banish the memory.

Then he smiled, a bit forced. "What a fine story to seduce you with." His eyes were still haunted with memories. She wished she could wipe away the pain that lurked behind his easygoing manner.

She glanced at the base of the pillar, frowning. "We don't have to dig him up, do we?"

Constantine shrugged. "I hope not."

"You're right. The story wasn't a great libido booster."

"Perhaps we should start again," he said, in a totally different tone of voice. He gripped her shoulders and spun her to face him, then captured her lips in a kiss. Her heart simply stopped beating; her breath caught in her throat. Capturing her lower lip, he sucked it into his mouth. Her arms slipped around his neck and drew him closer to her. She traced the rim of his mouth with her tongue then feathered little kisses along its edges. His thumbs stroked the line of her jaw while his fingers sketched the curve of her ears.

The kiss deepened. He tipped her chin up to better claim her lips. Then his hands skimmed down her sides, cupped her rear and lifted her right off the ground.

She yelped.

"I won't drop you," he whispered, resting his forehead against hers. "Trust me?"

"I do," she replied softly. "But if you make my good pair of jeans vanish with your finger trick, I am going to be very upset."

"You are bent on making things difficult." One arm held her up, cradling her as if she were on a swing, her back resting against the stone pillar. The other fiddled with the snap on her jeans, undid it and the zipper too. Her legs straddled him, dangling loose. He slid his finger around her waist, tickling her. Then he caught the back belt loop and tugged the jeans down.

She'd taken the time to dress in her good panties, a bright swath of red silk against her pale sun-starved skin. His breath hissed out at the sight of them.

He rimmed the fabric's waistband with a single finger. "You are layer upon layer of surprises." He glanced at her deep turquoise blue blouse. "Does more of the she-devil red lie beneath this?"

"You'll have to look for yourself."

His pants were tented, his shaft begging to be freed. He impatiently tugged at his waistband with one hand, then pulled open the clasp. "This would be easier if you'd allow a bit of magic," he said through gritted teeth.

"But not nearly as entertaining," Rose murmured. Watching the fabric whisper down his thigh was an exquisite torturous exercise. He leaned against her, pressing her breasts against his chest, while he stepped out of his pants legs.

"No underwear?" she teased. "I was hoping for a thong."

"Thongs only look good on women," he said. He settled them against the pillar again. She wrapped her legs around his waist.

"I beg to differ." Picturing a bit of black leather dividing his butt cheeks as it split and circled his waist made her wet. The same black leather lovingly wrapping his cock and balls was enough to make her gasp.

He placed a finger at the base of her throat. His skin seemed on fire. He bent the finger until she felt his nail scrape her flesh, then he ran it down the length of her shirt. The buttons simply fell off the shirt, bouncing off the flagstone.

"A little bit of magic," he whispered.

Her blouse parted, revealing her generous breasts encased in red satin. He leaned forward and kissed the round swells of each breast, then licked the valley between them.

"Oh," she gasped.

His eyes were filled with tenderness. "This quest is madness," he murmured. He kissed her nose, the bow in her lips, then her chin.

She rubbed her panties against his shaft. "Have me committed." Abruptly they were skin to skin.

"You promised," she accused.

"I promised nothing," he returned. His penis stroked the length of her labia lips, the soft skin of its head as smooth as chenille. "The touch of velvet skin against a bare pussy is so arousing, don't you think?" he whispered into her ear. His rounded head bumped against her clit.

"Your touch is an aphrodisiac," she murmured back. "Your voice electric. Your hands magic."

"And you, my muse." He slid his shaft into her.

She felt herself clench around him. His strokes were slow, stoking her inner fire. She couldn't stop touching him. The bunch and release of his shoulder muscles, the way his thigh muscles tensed as he dipped into her moistness, they combined as if an orchestra of sensations, weaving a spell around her.

Her hands fisted in his blond curls. He laid a line of kisses along her inner arms. Closing her eyes, she threw her head back. A warm breeze plucked at her hair, slapping the tails of her blouse against her bare ass.

The build-up to her orgasm was slow, like the lapping of waves against the shore. Each thrust, each whispered promise, brought the tide higher. When she finally gave in, it swept through her like a tropical storm. The tips of her toes curled. Her calves clenched. The shivers ran up her thighs and spread across her waist.

She felt the tension in him ease as he let himself release. His warmth pumped into her and she welcomed the invasion. He laid his sweaty brow upon her shoulder. She played with one of his curls, twisting it from finger to finger. Words were not needed. They were joined at the hip and more dangerously, at the heart.

* * * * *

"How touching," a woman's voice said.

Constantine stiffened. "Eros," he whispered to Rose's chest.

Rose turned her head. "Can I help you?" she asked, her voice coldly polite. Her feet dropped to the ground. She wrapped her arms around Constantine's waist, keeping them chest to breast.

Eros strode toward them. She looked like Rose today. No, not quite. She looked like what Rose might have been had the genetic die cocked slightly. A runway model version of Rose.

"You have something of mine," Eros said softly with Rose's voice. "I'm willing to trade."

"No deal," Rose replied.

Plumped coral lips pouted and Eros tsked. The noise sounded more like a growl than a purr. "My servant for this body." She ran her hands down the slim line of her body.

"Don't let her touch you," Constantine murmured. His arms wrapped tighter around her. "I will not give her up," he said loudly. "She is perfect as is."

"Oh please," Eros drawled. She strode closer, her hips swaying. "He'll be back in my boudoir in less than twelve hours." Her hazel eyes burned into Rose's. "And then what will you have? Nothing. Not him. Not this body. You will have no one." She preyed on the heart of Rose's fears.

Constantine grabbed Rose's chin, forcing her to look at him. "Don't listen to her. Do not bargain with a god. You're flawless."

Rose licked her lips, but couldn't seem to find the words. She shook her head. "No." The word was whispered.

He didn't know who she was denying, himself, herself or Eros.

"I am being generous, mortal. I could have you turned to stone instead." She examined her nails. "Whoops." She sized Rose up with a single gaze. "See how fickle I am. Deal's off. Stone it is."

Constantine looked down. Rose's legs and waist were a washed-out gray granite. The stone crept like fingers past her waist, encasing her breasts in spidery veins of stone. Her breath caught in her throat.

"Constantine." Her breath came in gasps, her hazel eyes wide in horror.

He didn't know what to do to save her. "Rose, oh Blessed Goddess, Rose." His hands stroked her body, tried to fight back the stone's crawl. He interposed himself between Rose and Eros. "Leave her alone, witch."

"You will pay for that comment with blood," Eros said mildly. "In the meantime, you can watch your only hope die with your whore."

The stone was spreading up her throat. Rose could no longer turn her head. She took short hiccupping breaths, then closed her eyes.

"No!" Constantine tried to shake her, but the stone-encased skin was unyielding. "Rose, look at me. Blessed Goddess, Rose, look at me."

Her eyes fluttered open. There was fear in their depths, but also an intense love he never thought he'd see again. He didn't deserve it. "Rose," he whispered. He laid his lips against her cold stone cheek.

"You will make a nice statue in my garden," Eros said. "I'll even have roses planted at your feet. Con can visit you every day."

"No!" Constantine lunged at Eros, grabbing her by the throat. His momentum flung them against a column. He dangled Eros' feet off the ground.

"You, of all creatures, should know better than to toy with the gods." Eros lifted one hand. His body smacked against a wall. A trickle of blood ran out of the corner of his mouth.

He couldn't fight her and win. Instead, he forced himself to his knees. "Eros," he begged. "Let her go and I will come with you. I will do as you wish."

"You will do as I wish regardless of whether the mortal lives or dies."

"Enough," a quiet voice said. The power that radiated from that single word rippled the air around them.

Eros turned toward the newcomer. Constantine lifted his head.

"Atropos," he whispered.

Atropos, the third Fate, wore a high-collared black dress. Its hem dragged on the ground as she walked, her steps slow and measured. Her gray hair was sparse, clipped short to her scalp. A shawl made of spider silk was draped around her arms and back. It shimmered in the sunlight. "It is not yet time to cut this woman's thread. And I will not."

"Then her heart beats encased in stone. I care not," Eros replied.

"That is not the way of things." Atropos held out a gnarled, vein-ridden hand to Constantine. "Do not prostrate yourself before her."

He took it and she pulled him up. "Atropos, I will give you my life. I beg you. Don't let her die."

Atropos patted his cheek, a gesture so like her sister goddess, Lachesis. "Your life is not yours to give...yet. Go to her. I will be with you in a moment."

"You have no power here," Eros shrieked. "He is mine."

"On St. Valentine's Day, Cupid is reclaimed by the Fates. That's always how it has been, Eros. You cannot change that."

"He will pay for your treachery," Eros snarled. She was no longer a beautiful creature, but something more sinister. Shadows swirled at her feet. The wind picked up its pace, sending clouds to cover the sun.

Atropos pulled off her shawl. "Not today, Eros." And she flung the shawl. The fabric twisted and turned, capturing Eros in its threads. Eros struggled in its sticky grip, but could not break free. "And perhaps, not tomorrow either." Atropos brushed her palms together as if wiping away crumbs. Eros and the shawl vanished.

Atropos reached Rose's side and laid a kiss on her cheek. She kissed Constantine's cheek as well. "You've done well," she said to them both. "Now go home. Rest. And break the curse."

Chapter Three



Rose woke up wrapped in Constantine's arms. Encased would perhaps have been a better word. She couldn't move. His legs twined through hers. One of his arms was draped around her shoulder, another at her waist. She began nibbling on his neck.

"Rose." He squeezed her tighter.

"Careful. I'm not stone anymore. I might break."

He pulled them both upright so fast her head spun. "Rose!" He showered kisses on her lips, her cheeks, the hollow of her neck. She felt as if she were being consumed.

"Easy now." She put both her hands on his chest. "I'm alive. I'm okay." *A bit terrified*, but she didn't want to voice that fear. She had never considered the repercussions of taunting a god. Almost being turned to stone was a great way to build a foundation of respect.

But it also underscored what Constantine must have endured all these centuries under Eros' "care". Rose had seen the scars on his back, the pain in his eyes. He needed her. And she would be strong enough for both of them.

"Rose," he murmured, his lips brushing the pulse at the nape of her neck. "I almost lost you." He clung to her.

She stroked his hair, rocking him gently. "It's five p.m. already. And we're only half done." She felt him go very still in her arms. "Once below the leather strap. Once where feet must tread and at last within the trap." She didn't want to think about that last line.

"We're done."

She brushed the stray curls away from his forehead and kissed it. "So which one of us gets to dress up in leather and chains?" she continued, ignoring him.

He straightened, cupping her face in both hands. "I won't see you hurt. It isn't worth it." The pain in his eyes was raw.

She closed her eyes. "Do you think Eros will leave me alone if we lose?" she whispered. Constantine's grip tightened on her painfully.

She couldn't face him and still be strong, so she looked at his bare biceps. Tracing the remaining three tattoos, she said, "I'm a nurse. Helping people, making their lives a little more tolerable, gives me a sense of purpose. But you, even in the brief time I've known you, have given me much more than that." She took his hand away from her cheek and laid it over her heart. "Potions or not. Gods or not. We will see this through. And you will be free." Because she thought she might cry, she dropped his hand and jumped off the bed. "I'm going to fix us a meal and you're going to figure out the next bit."

* * * * *

With Rose's car still dead in the driveway, they were left with nothing but her neighbor's beater truck for transportation. Constantine waited, hunched down in the truck, while Rose ran into the tack shop to purchase a riding crop. He was surprised when she returned with a leather duster as well. Her lips curved into a smile, the potion's dark passion swirling in the depths of her hazel eyes. Now that he could disguise his wings, he insisted on joining her in the costume shop.

She wore a pair of dark straight-legged jeans. He wished he'd have talked her into wearing a skirt. He missed seeing the sexy curve of her muscled calves, the sweep of the pale skin that rushed upward to form the swell of her hips. Her striped blouse was held close to her waist with a few buttons. The demure camisole she wore beneath teased him with a hint of her cleavage every time she moved.

She held a French maid costume to her chest and looked at him. He shook his head. No, he wanted to see her in a corset, its stiff lines accenting her curves. He wanted to lace her into it himself, hear her gasp when he snugged it tight across her breasts. She

needed a garter belt as well. He could feel the smooth caress of silk as he rolled the stockings up her legs, one at a time. *Damn it.* He was losing control.

Moving on to another rack, he flipped through the garments, but he couldn't focus. All he saw was Rose's dark areola tense as his tongue laved her nipple. His breath came quick. His penis strained at his pants, begging for release. He glanced up. Rose met his gaze. The shop was too small, the air stifling. His look was possessive, filled with desire and need. Her eyes darkened. He saw her nipples thrust through the fabric of both blouse and cami.

He glanced around. The grandmotherly sales clerk was reading a book at the checkout counter. Another couple was three racks away, immersed more in themselves than Con and Rose. A third woman was pawing through the clothes against the wall.

Rose sashayed up to him, a pile of clothes draped over one arm. "Have any luck?" She smelled of sex, the sweet cloying scent of arousal.

"You're wet," he said bluntly.

"Oh god yes. Pick something out and let's get out of here." Her eyes were dark, pupils overwhelming the brown and gold specks.

"Why not here?"

Her eyes widened and her breath hitched. She looked around, then at him. She lowered her voice. "Here?"

He bent his head, seizing her lower lip and sucking it into his mouth. Her tongue flicked into his, playing with the tips of his teeth. She leaned into him, a slight motion, but enough for her to feel him thick and hard and ready for her. Drawing away, he turned and headed for the changing room. He did not look to see if she followed.

The door closed behind him. He grinned to himself.

"The shop is only thirty feet long," Rose hissed. "The sales clerk would hear if I flushed a tampon down the toilet let alone us having sex."

"She has a good book," he murmured. He stroked his finger in the dip of her breasts.

The clothes she was holding dropped into a heap on the floor.

He grabbed the waistband of her jeans and tugged her toward him.

"Behave!"

"You didn't follow me in here to just try on clothes."

Color bloomed high on her cheeks. She looked down. He took her hands in his, guiding them to his crotch. "I want you." Her hands closed around him. He tweaked her nipples through her shirt. "You want me." She did not move. He saw her pulse jumping along the edge of her throat. "It's okay to be scared."

Her head jerked up, eyes flashing fire and heat. He thought he was going to burst into flames. "Scared? Try hot. Wet. Needy." Her fingers wrapped around his shaft and stroked him, her grip painfully tight. "Damn you. Damn you and your potions and your sex and your charm."

Her hands curled into fists and she beat on his chest.

He caught her by the wrists, confused. "Rose. Let's go outside."

She twisted her wrists free. He heard the pop of his pants button as it bounced off the wall. She grasped the edges of his fly and tore the zipper open. Her eyes were wild, the dark potion swirling in their depths. She was a woman possessed.

She pressed against him until his back was tight to the wall. Her hands ripped the pants he was wearing as she wrenched them down his ass.

"Easy," he whispered, hands on her shoulders.

"Fuck you. Do this. Do that." She pulled down her pants and panties in one quick motion. She stood on her tiptoes, lips to lips. "You want me? Take me now." And she pressed her sopping juncture tight to his shaft.

His arms wrapped around her. She slid onto him with a whispered moan.

She was impossibly wet. He thrust into her hard, jarring her off her feet as their hips ground together. Her labia lips made soft sucking noises. He felt her clench around him, her vagina trying to swallow his cock and balls all at once. Her nails dug into his ass. She buried her face against his neck to muffle her cries.

Her pace was frantic. The mirror on the wall bounced in its brackets. He felt her go rigid. Her fingers curled and he swore she drew blood. Arching her back, she collapsed against him. He wiggled his shaft inside her. Her fingers wrapped around him, adding pressure and a tightness he could not deny. She moved her hips, teasing him, until the tip of his penis was just riding the lip of her cavern, then crashed against him with a fierceness that left him gasping.

“Gentle, Rose.”

Her grip tightened and she toyed with him again. It was exquisite torture, his shaft licked by her pussy lips, her fingers adding tension. He exploded in her, his cream dribbling down her inner thighs.

There was a knock on the changing room door.

The dark passion still swirled in Rose’s eyes. Constantine worried what she might say or do. She put a hand on his chest, stilling him. Unlocking the door, she opened it a crack. “Yes?”

A perfectly manicured hand poked through the opening, holding several sheets of paper toweling.

Rose took them. “Thank you.”

“Looking for an extra set of hands?” a woman’s voice asked.

“Sorry, but I’m not willing to share.”

“Ah. Pity.” The woman sounded disappointed. “I wouldn’t either. Good show though.” And the door closed.

Constantine held up the ruined pair of pants. Rose gave him a conspiratorial smile. “Looks like you’re wearing leather whether you want to or not.”

* * * * *

She watched Constantine scurry around her bedroom, lighting candles and laying out his chosen props. He still wore the duster, now open to reveal the flat expanse of his chest and abs. His wings, tucked beneath the coat, made his shoulders appear even broader than they were. She could easily spend a day just worshipping that chest.

If she survived until tomorrow, she was calling in sick to work.

He must have sensed her emotions. Straightening, he grabbed her around the waist and swung her off her feet then kissed her soundly on the lips. She laughed, seizing his shoulders for support. "I wish we had all the time in the world, sweeting. To taste, to explore. I feel like we're losing something precious in the rush."

She looked into those deep midnight eyes and felt herself drowning. "I don't feel cheated, Constantine."

"I do," he whispered.

Stepping back, he pulled off his coat. His wings expanded to their full width, wingtips stretching from wall to wall. He wore a pair of black leather pants, the leather embracing every muscled curve. He looked like an avenging angel. All he needed was a sword. She'd never be able to look at a sweet cherub angel and think of Cupid again.

She opened her bathrobe, letting it slide down her shoulders for Constantine's benefit. Her red corset—Constantine had insisted it be red—propped her full breasts up until they threatened to spill over the top. At least the corset sucked in her waist, giving her the illusion of full lush curves in all the right places. She wore black seamed thigh-highs, held in place with a garter, and a pair of kitten-heeled shoes. She didn't trust herself on spikes.

Rose smiled. His sword had appeared. She wanted to unsheathe it from its leather-bound prison and hold it in her hands.

"Come here," she said. Her voice sounded husky.

"No."

She blinked a couple times. "I thought...that is." Oh for chrissake, he wasn't rejecting her. Where was her spine? She raised her chin. "Do you have something else in mind?"

"Yes, I do." He dropped to his knees in front of her, then licked a line around the waistband of her panties. He gazed at her through a mop of blond hair. Those midnight eyes hid all sorts of desires.

His hands skimmed her thighs, spreading them. He stroked the sensitive skin of her inner thighs with his thumbs, sliding higher and higher with each stroke. Then he slipped her panties down her legs, trapping her at her ankles. She teetered, off balance.

One hand caught her buttocks and held her in place. She saw the muscles in his arm jump but it was as if she weighed nothing. His focus was not on her weight, but the moist cave before him. He parted her labia lips with the other hand and stroked her nodule with his tongue. Just a soft swipe, a teasing preview of what he had to offer. She sighed.

He pressed his lips to her nub, kissing it. His tongue flicked out and swirled around her. She squirmed against him. Her insides clenched, found nothing inside to fold itself around and shuddered. His busy tongue played along the length of one lip, then up the other side, careful to not touch her opening. She whimpered. The feathers of his wings teased the sensitive skin of her thighs and inner arms.

"Con, I need you." Her hands fisted in his hair, rough.

He continued licking, ignoring her plea. Her body was throbbing. She needed something in her, now. If not Con, then anything else would do. Just as long as it was hard and thick and ready to penetrate her.

"Con." She pulled his head away from her by his hair. Tipping his head back, she stared in the drowning depths of his eyes. "In. Now." She surprised herself with the urgency in her voice.

"And if I say no?" His voice was smooth, like honey, his lips glistening with her juices. His gaze flicked to the riding crop laid across the bed.

“You want me to beat your ass until you listen to me?” Her voice raised a notch.

He buried his head back in her mound. His lips closed around her nodule and just the tip of his tongue flitted across it. Back and forth. Back and forth.

She jerked his head back again. “Con, dammit. I’m dying up here.” His thumb trailed across her opening, dipped just the tip of the nail into it and slid away. Her insides clenched, frustrated.

Her hand closed around the riding crop without conscious thought. She brought it down on his leather-clad ass with a swift pop of leather against leather. He paused only long enough to lick along the junction of her thigh, sending a whole new wave of pulsations through her body. Then he was back at it, worshiping her pearly nub. Lifting her feet, one at time, she stepped out of both her panties and her shoes. If he wouldn’t give her satisfaction, she’d take matters into her own hands.

He sensed the change in mood and seized her hand before she could slip a finger into herself. She beat a rat-a-tat-tat cadence against his leather-covered ass with the crop, the angle all wrong to do actual harm to his body. Which was clever on his part. Because she was ready to hurt him.

She was abruptly pitched backward, trapped against the carpeting and caged by his arms and wings. She struggled under his weight. His hand held both her wrists with one hand. The other cupped her mons.

“What is it that you want?” he asked, ever so polite. But the darkness danced in his eyes, a primitive desire to possess and need to be possessed.

“Let me go and I’ll show you,” she replied, her voice just as sweet.

He surprised her by relaxing. She rolled them over, so that she pinned him down with her hips. His wings fanned out on either side of him. Her pussy made wet kiss marks on his pants. She fumbled with the button on his pants and managed to get the zipper down before he seized her hips. He dragged her up his body, her labia lips sliding over the ridges of his abs, up the center of his chest to his waiting mouth. The light hairs on his chest only added to the sensation, tickling all the hidden parts his

tongue hadn't yet reached. She trembled, teetering on the edge of an orgasmic cliff. His lips parted and he settled her over them. Then his tongue dipped into her sopping interior.

Her insides clenched and she bucked against his mouth. Twisting in his grasp, she grabbed his calves and dragged herself back down his body. His penis, freed from its leather sheath, stood at attention. Had her nerves not been stretched to their breaking point, she might have returned his attentions. Instead she buried herself on top his shaft, wiggled down it before he could shift away. He filled her up, until all she felt was the clenching of her insides and his shaft inside her.

She was nothing but nerves and wetness. Her body rocked against him, pressing her nodule to his muscled flesh, rubbing up and down his shaft. She felt his hands on her ass, kneading her buttocks. And then the tension broke and she gasped in pleasure as the wave rolled through her body, primordial and sinful. She clung to his calves to keep from falling.

He continued to thrust into her, arching her back so he could grab her breasts. His thumbs circled her erect nipples, sending her into another spasm of waves. And then he exploded inside her. She ground her hips into him, feeling him shudder beneath her.

He pulled her back until she laid flat on his chest, staring at the ceiling. His fingers lazily toyed with her nipples, rubbing them between his fingers and stretching them.

"I was expecting a lot more role-playing."

"Are you disappointed?"

"You made me want to hurt you." It wasn't exactly a charming side of her she wished to expose.

"You didn't."

"But I could have. And I wanted to." *That was wrong.*

"We all have dark sides to our personality," he said softly.

She knew he was thinking about his curse. Deep down, she liked her edgy dark side. It was uninhibited, demanding and primal. She liked it a lot. She glanced at the riding crop. It spawned visions of leather corsets and thigh-high boots.

She rolled over so that they were face-to-face. "I need a shower. You?"

His lips curved into a smile. "Are you propositioning me?"

"Quite honestly, no." She touched his cheek, before he could look away. "There's a difference between rejection and just having a sated partner. I am full." She propped herself up on her elbows. "And sticky and sweaty." She glanced at his arms. "Two to go." The words died on her lips.

She stroked his biceps. "There's only one tattoo left."

"What?" She slid into Con's lap as he sat up. His fingers folded over hers, following her tracks. "That's not possible," he said.

Their eyes met. "The quickie at the costume shop?"

And then he laughed. It was a pure clear sound and it set her heart singing. He swept them up to their feet and he hugged her tight. "One left. By the gods, I only have one binding left." He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bathroom. "Now all we have to do is find Eros' trap."

"That won't be a problem," a woman said. Eros sat in the whirlpool tub, covered in bubbles, a glass of champagne in her hand. She took a sip. "Take them," she said.

Four gargoyles emerged from the tiles on the wall, their bodies leaving behind gaping holes in the drywall, and seized them.

Chapter Four



Constantine wrapped his wings around both of them, hiding their nakedness from the gods. His arms held Rose tight against his chest. He would die before losing her again. A man-sized hourglass was set near the raised dais at the front of the room. A handful of sands remained in the top.

The gods were arranged in a loose semicircle on the raised dais. Zeus sat in the middle, a bored look on his face. His sons and daughters sat at his sides. Constantine saw no sign of the Fates.

Eros walked around the steel cage Constantine and Rose were enclosed in. Her skin was olive-hued today, dark eyes large and luminous, set in a face only a god could carve. High aristocratic cheekbones, almond-shaped eyes and crimson-splashed lips completed the portrait. Her dark hair cascaded in a silky smooth wave down her back. Gold chains draped her neck and her waist. It was all that covered her body. With every movement she made, her chains tinkled, like distant wind chimes.

“I brought you here to display the Fates’ treachery. So all the gods may see that it was not my hand that destroyed my servant’s life and the life of this mortal.” She turned her back to the gods and bared a set of gleaming pointed white teeth. “We will have fun together, Rose and I. Don’t worry, I’ll let you listen to her screams.” She pitched her voice low, so none on the dais could hear her.

Constantine made no reply, but he felt Rose’s body tense, her hands clench into fists. “She wants us to fight back,” he breathed into her ear.

Rose remained silent.

“What, no taunts? No last pleas for her life.” When they still remained silent, she pouted. “Rose, if you offered yourself to me, I might lessen his punishment.”

Rose spat at Eros.

The spit ran down Eros’ cheek. Eros slowly wiped it away with a fingertip. Her black eyes sparkled. “I will kill you for that.”

She turned away and walked to the dais, her hips swaying seductively.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” Constantine said softly.

Rose turned in his embrace. Her hazel eyes were bright with rage, passion and frustration. “This is the trap,” she hissed. “This. This is where we free you of Eros.” Her fingers wrapped around the final tattoo on his arm.

His heart leaped. He glanced at the hourglass. “There is no time.”

“There is,” she insisted. She grasped his penis and began stroking it with her fingers, slowly drawing it out of its slumber. Kissing his lips, she kept her eyes open. He saw her fire flare, yellows and greens rolling in their hazel depths. She pressed herself tight to him and he felt her other hand fingering her clit. He almost came right then and there. Nothing was more arousing than a woman pleasuring herself.

He shifted. “Don’t move,” she instructed. “This is my doing.” She laid her head on his shoulder. He watched her out of the corner of his eyes.

She was insane to try winning his freedom here before the gods. Yet her strokes continued, clenching, sliding and pulling until he was erect. Then she snuggled closer, guiding him into her sheath. He felt her erect nipples jab him in the chest. Her fingers walked up his sides, then slid down and grabbed his buttocks.

This standing still would kill him.

She moved ever so slightly against him, up and back, up and back. Her hand wrapped around his penis, adding friction and a tightness he could barely resist. The other hand continued kneading his ass.

“Rose,” he groaned.

Eros spun around. "No!"

He met Eros' black gaze and exploded within Rose. His gaze dropped to hers, tender. She continued rubbing against him, frantic now. His hands went to her breasts, tweaking her nipples.

Eros flew to the cage, wrapping her hands around the bars.

And Constantine felt Rose's vagina seize him like a velvet fist.

He did not know what happened then. The world seemed to explode around them. The cage pitched at a crazy angle. They were thrown to the ground. The sky rained feathers and he heard the hourglass shatter, the glass pelting the marble floor like sleet. His lips found Rose's and their arms wrapped around one another. Eros' shriek was loud in his ears and a voice, cloaked in thunder, echoed back.

Then there was nothing but silence.

"Are we dead?" Rose asked, face pressed to Constantine's chest.

She was curled in a ball, arms wrapped around his chest. He cupped her body protectively. He felt a healing warmth spill across his back, then something skittered up the curve of his spine as if ascending a staircase and paused on his shoulder. He opened one eye.

A fat black spider perched on his biceps muscle. "You are free," a tiny voice whispered. Then it clambered up a silken thread and vanished out of his line of sight.

Constantine sat up, pulling Rose with him. She opened those hazel eyes and he stared into a face he knew he could never live without.

"Con," she whispered. She touched his bare biceps muscle, free of Eros' foul tattoo. Then surprise flicked into her eyes. "Constantine, your wings." She stroked her hands over his smooth back.

He reached back and felt nothing. His lips curved into a smile, matching hers. Then he picked her up and spun her around madly, while she laughed, back arched, arms held over her head.

He carefully set her on her feet. Her arms wound around his neck. "Happy Valentine's Day, Rose," he whispered.

"The first of many." And she sealed the promise with a kiss.

About the Author

Christine McKay was born and raised in northeastern Wisconsin, graduated in a class of less than 54 students, and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science at a local college taught mostly by nuns. She is the oldest in her family, with two brothers and one sister.

Christine lives on a farm with her husband and an assortment of four-legged creatures including goats, mules, dogs, rabbits, cats, chickens, a donkey, and a llama. Her favorite authors include Robin McKinley, Patricia McKillip, Anne McCaffrey, Ayn Rand, Andre Norton, and Nora Roberts.

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